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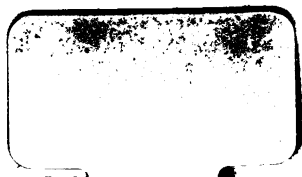
CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

MRS. HUGH BELL

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Conversational Openings and Endings



Conversational Openings and Endings

Some Hints for Playing the Game
of Small Talk and other
Society Pastimes

By

Mrs. Hugh Bell

Revised and Enlarged Edition

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OF VERMONT

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book does not pretend to be a handbook to the art of conversation. It only professes to suggest a few formulas to be used on certain definite occasions.

We have one or two such already, it is true, and how invaluable they are to us ! We have—"How do you do ?" "Good-bye," "Please," "Thank you," "I beg your pardon," "Not at all," "I shall be delighted," &c. &c.

What should we do without some of these ? Imagine the additional mental strain it would be if, instead of saying "Thank you," for instance, we had to invent some new combination of words every time we were grateful, or, still worse, every time we wished to appear so ! It will not bear thinking of.

My dream is that there should be many, many more formulas of the same kind ; that there should never be an occasion in daily life, in short, when, as now so often happens, two human beings confront each other in speechless misery because they can think of nothing to

INTRODUCTION

say. It is a humiliating spectacle, and a state of things which imperatively calls for a remedy. But how is it to be remedied? This is not, perhaps, altogether a case for State interference and legislation. Let us appeal therefore to that which is often far more efficacious, well-directed private effort; and form a Society for the Opening of Conversations on Sundays—S.O.C.O.S.—a day on which social intercourse is particularly active. And let the aims of that Society—hereinafter described as the “S.O.C.O.S.”—be to draw up a series of consecrated phrases to be used in the various small crises of life as they arise. The labour of existence will be thereby incalculably modified.

Nuns, I believe, meeting on the stairs or in the passages of the convent, are provided by their rule with something they are obliged to say—some question or answer, or rather remark and rejoinder, generally concerning the pious grounds of their faith. That was no doubt instituted as a preventive measure, in order that the momentary *tête-à-tête* might not give an opportunity for mundane gossip. How advantageous it would be for us, though for somewhat different reasons, if our chance meetings were provided with a like resource! Who does not know the suffering of being brought face to face in the street with an indifferent acquaintance whom one hasn't seen for some time, and saying with the enthusiasm and

INTRODUCTION

momentum engendered by surprise, "Why, *how* do you do?"—and then remaining speechless, with every idea paralysed, until in desperation one of the two says, with still greater appearance of enthusiasm, "Well, *good-bye*!" and turns away hurriedly, feeling angry and foolish? Conceive the relief it would be if one speaker might invariably say, "The Queen is great!" and the other, "And so is the Prime Minister!" or any other formula they choose to employ.

Still more terrible, perhaps, than this situation, is that of being presented to some celebrated man whom one has always longed to meet, and then being absolutely unable to think of anything to say. This is nothing short of agony. Conceive the relief, then, that it would be if, on being presented to a famous composer, custom prescribed that the person presented should begin at once humming a portion of one of the great man's operas, which the latter would then take up in the bass and continue until such time as one of the two had thought of something to say!

But alas, so far custom has prescribed nothing of the kind. It behoves the S.O.C.O.S., therefore, to bring into use a series of Conversational Openings, in the sense of Openings of Chess, the acquirement of which may enable the ordinary mortal to play the game of conversation with

INTRODUCTION

average skill. I feel sure that those of us who suffer acutely from a deep-seated paucity of the idea will welcome this suggestion gladly. To initiate the enterprise, I beg humbly to offer in the following pages some suggestions for beginnings of conversation, with some hints as to the direction in which such beginnings will probably lead. And if any object that I am hereby enriching the world's store of platitudes, I reply, *Bis dicit qui cito dicit*—that is, one platitude at the right moment is worth a dozen repartees the next morning.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

	PAGE
DINER-OUT'S OPENING	12
STAIRCASE OPENING	15
SOUP OPENING	17
GOURMET OPENING	18
TEMPERANCE OPENING	19
BREAD OPENING	19
WHITE'S PLAYFUL BREAD OPENING	20
WHITE'S GEOGRAPHICAL OPENING	21
AUNT'S FRIEND OPENING	22
RETURNED TRAVELLER'S OPENING	23
FRIEND'S GAMBIT	28
AFTER-DINNER OPENING	29
WOMEN'S AFTER-DINNER OPENING	30
CHILDREN'S OPENING	32
ARRIVAL OPENING	34
LONG SEPARATION OPENING	36
RENEWED-MEETING OPENING	36
DRAWING ROOM TEA OPENING	37
BREAD-AND-BUTTER OPENING	38
PLAYFUL BREAD-AND-BUTTER OPENING	39
NIGHT'S INQUIRIES OPENING	40

CONTENTS

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS— <i>(continued)</i>		PAGE
CORRESPONDENCE OPENING		41
MINOR POET'S OPENING		42
ASPIRING NOVELIST'S OPENING		43
FRIEND'S READING OPENING		43
PERFORMER'S OPENING		44
PERSONAL OPENINGS		45
CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS		
ACADEMY ENDING		48
REGRETFUL SURPRISE ENDING		51
FRIEND-IN-CARRIAGE ENDING		52
WAITING AUNT		53
DRAWING ROOM TEA ENDING		54
DRAWING-ROOM GAMES		
THE CRUSH		56
MUSICAL PARTY, OR UNMUSICAL CHAIRS		57
FRIENDS IN THE CORNER		58
VANISHING CONVERSATION		59
THE INVISIBLE JOKE		60
HIDING THE TEAPOT		60
AMATEURS		61
CAPPING MALADIES		62
POUNCERS		62
CARD TRICKS		62

Conversational Openings and Endings

I HAVE adopted the phraseology of a Handbook to Chess, as being most suitable for my purpose.

By Player is meant the interlocutor, and for further convenience I shall designate the male interlocutor as Black, and the female as White, unless otherwise specified—these being the prevalent hues of male and female costume at evening gatherings, where conversation runs highest.

We will begin with the moment when one of the guests who are to play the game of conversation is ushered into the room at a dinner party. There is generally a pause as the hostess, breaking off the talk she was engaged in, goes forward to greet him. Some simple opening is then urgently needed ; otherwise, after the hostess has shaken hands with him, the next move will present a great difficulty.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

If Black is either the first arrival or the last, the opening is obvious. Thus :

THE DINER-OUT'S OPENING

Black.

1. I see I am the first.

White.

1. You are delightfully
punctual.

There is now no course open to Black but to continue in the same direction, implying his rapture at having twenty minutes to wait before dinner is announced.

Or, if Black is the last, then this is the opening almost invariably used.

Black.

1. I fear I am the last.

White.

1. Some one must be the
last, you know.

Black's usual reply to this is :

Black.

2. Ha, ha ! He, he !

to which a player on White's side instantly rejoins :

White.

2. Dinner is ready.

This rapid advance of White's man will probably discomfit Black and scatter his ideas.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

If, however, Black is neither the first player nor the last, he must try some quite different opening, as the above form would not be suitable. He should never begin thus :

Black.

1. I am afraid I am the middle one.

I propose, therefore, that a player who arrives about this stage should invariably use the following opening, each according to his dwelling :

Black.

1. From Curzon Street.

White.

1. To Lennox Gardens.

After which all the players in the room might rapidly mutter over and over again the names of their respective abodes. This would have the effect of a general buzz of conversation, for which it would be found an excellent substitute, as in this preliminary stage of the game the players cannot be expected to display much originality or invention.

Some other form of the Diner-out's Opening is needed subsequently, when Black is introduced to the lady he is to take down to dinner. And here let me say that by far the best openings are those derived from, and suggested

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

by, the situation itself. It would be extremely crude and awkward, when you are going to take a lady down to dinner, to say with an ingratiating smile, as you offer your arm, "It has been very foggy to-day!" as though the logical deduction from that remark must be: "It has been very foggy to-day; therefore let us go down stairs in couples!"—which is absurd. Or else, "Have you heard Perosi's last oratorio?" as if implying "If you have not heard it, I fear I cannot take you down." It is better to say something so entirely colourless that your interlocutor shall hardly realise what it is, but shall simply be conscious of being relieved both from the mental strain of finding something to say or from the embarrassment of silence.

Black.

1. I believe I am to have
the pleasure of taking you
down to dinner.

White.

1. I believe so.

If Black is a player of coolness and experience, and is conscious that he has time before him, he will continue for the moment to advance cautiously in the same direction without attempting any startling deviation. If White is well matched with him she will follow in the same line. Thus :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

2. I always feel it is rather dangerous to be introduced too early to the person you are going down with.

3. For fear we should have nothing more to say when we get into the dining-room.

White.

2. Why?

3. What, have you so little confidence? &c. &c.

These moves and a few more on the same lines will be found sufficient to keep the players going till the important movement to the dining-room is made, after which the real interest of the game begins.

Or Black may be introduced at the last moment before going down to dinner. He should then (in more senses than one) use

THE STAIRCASE OPENING

Black.

1. The staircases of London houses are not adapted to going down two abreast.

White.

1. No, indeed.

Or,

Black.

1. What a comfort it is to find a staircase wide enough to go down two abreast!
2. There are too many staircases in London houses.

White.

1. Yes, indeed.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

No. 2 is a skilful move on the part of Black, and ought, if well managed, to lead to a discussion of the merits of flats *versus* other places of residence.

Variation. White begins.

White.

1. I wish the people behind me wouldn't tread on my gown.
2. They say that the best tempered woman is angry if her gown is trodden upon.
3. Oh, *I* don't pretend, &c. &c.

Black.

1. It must be very trying to the temper.
2. I am watching anxiously to see if any one treads on yours.

This should lead to the discussion of White's character and the most interesting combinations.

But if Black is an unskilful player his rejoinders will be—

White.

1. I wish the people behind me wouldn't tread on my gown.
2. They say the best-tempered woman is angry if her gown is trodden upon.

Black.

1. Ah!
2. Oh!

If White is cautious, she will now abandon her first scheme, and begin her attack in another direction.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Or we will suppose that the opening has been postponed until the moment of sitting down to dinner. If the players are equally matched, the game ought now to be of the greatest interest. If, however, as is often the case, they are entirely unequal, the more skilful player will find any original or unconventional attack, any direct opening, quite useless. By the direct opening, examples of which will be given later, I mean a plunge at once into a discussion of the personal opinions or proclivities of either of the players, instead of some general platitude.

Assuming this inequality, we will suppose Black to begin.

SOUP OPENING

Black.

1. Do you say drink soup,
or eat soup?
2. What do you say, then?

White.

1. I really don't know—I
don't think I say either.
2. I really don't know—I
don't think I say anything.

This is entirely unfavourable to Black, who will find that his scheme has been thwarted by White's want of originality, and that he will have to try something else.

On the other hand, it may happen that White is a player of about the same strength as Black, and will rejoin with the following :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

1. Do you say eat soup, or drink soup?
2. You may not say to "take" it either, I believe.

White.

1. That is a question I have spent my life in trying to solve.
2. No, certainly not! though I really don't know why, &c. &c.

This is a more promising beginning, and should within six or seven remarks lead to discussing the influence of temporary fashion on the transformation of language.

GOURMET OPENING

Black.

(Handing bill of fare.)

1. Are you interested in this document?

White.

1. Do you think women ought not to be?

This is an excellent instance of a direct opening on the part of White, and should lead to the best results.

Variation :

White.

1. Do you think it unfeminine of me to ask you for the bill of fare?
2. I only wish I could!

Black.

1. On the contrary, it shows you are not going to eat your way doggedly through the whole of it.

This is a mistake on the part of White. It may lead

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

to comparing digestions, in which case Black wins in six moves. This leads me to mention the

MEDICAL OPENING.

This is a common one, but should be avoided. Thus :

White.

1. Do you say drink soup,
or eat soup?

Black.

1. I never have occasion to
say either, my doctor absolutely
forbids me ever to
touch it.

This, unless White has the presence of mind instantly to make a rapid diversion, will certainly end in Black's advance in the same direction, and the entire discomfiture of White.

TEMPERANCE OPENING

Black.

1. Might I ask you to pass
me the water?

White.

1. Certainly. Are you a
teetotaler?

In four moves Black should now be in the middle of a discussion on temperance.

BREAD OPENING

This is a commonplace, but very useful, opening.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

1. Is this your bread or mine?

1. Really! I always keep mine on my right.

White.

1. Yours, I think. I always keep mine on my left.

2. On your right! do you? That is a sign of an original mind.

This game promises well for Black.

Variation : White's

PLAYFUL BREAD OPENING

Black.

1. Is this your bread or mine?

White.

1. Mine, I think, as well as the last. You have already eaten two rolls that were meant for me.

This game should be rapid and lively.

Any form of general opening may, of course, also be used at dinner, although suited to other occasions also. Foremost of these is the well-known and well-worn Weather Opening, which is in universal use. When this opening is employed, however, the line the game will take is generally determined not by the first move of all, which is entirely preliminary, but by the rejoinder to it. We subjoin some specimens of beginnings of games. Black may be supposed to be one of the steady, safe players who invariably begin by the Weather Opening.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

If White is of the same kind the game does not promise much interest, and the course of it will probably be much as follows :

Black.

1. How very cold it has been to-day !
2. But not as cold as yesterday.
3. But the day before yesterday, Thursday, was the worst.
4. Yes, very.

White.

1. Oh, very.
2. No, not quite.
3. And Wednesday, do you remember ? Oh, it *was* cold on Wednesday.

Black is now in perpetual check, and the game should be abandoned.

If, on the other hand, White is a player with more initiative, she will reply by a move which will at once take the game into quite another direction. For example :

WHITE'S GEOGRAPHICAL OPENING

is an excellent one and adapted to almost any capacity.

Black.

1. How very cold it has been to-day !
2. Really ! Are you a Cockney ?

White.

1. Yes, indeed—though I ought to be accustomed to the weather in London, as it is my native air.

Or if, as frequently happens, Black should prefer that

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

the interest of the game should not centre round White, his second move will be as follows :

2. I haven't that reason for tolerating it. I was born in Devonshire.

3. Do you know it at all ?

2. Devonshire ! Oh, what a delightful part of the country !

Variation :

Black.

1. How very cold it has been to-day !

White.

1. Yes, indeed—almost as cold as my native Yorkshire.

and White has a good game.

This can be combined with

THE AUNT'S FRIEND OPENING

White.

1. I think you know my aunt.

Black.

1. Your aunt ?

This is the only rejoinder Black can safely make. White's opening was a very embarrassing one for Black, as it gave him no clue to the identity of White's aunt.

White.

2. Yes, Mrs. Mackay.

Black.

2. Oh, to be sure, yes—we met her in the Engadine last year.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

THE RETURNED TRAVELLER'S OPENING

is also a form of the Geographical Opening, but the game derived from it must be treated with great skill in order to present any interest.

In this game Black obviously represents the newly returned traveller, White the friend he meets. Black to move in one direction only, and to mate in eight moves.

We give the probable course of the game as likely to be played by Mr. Smith (Black), the great London player, and Mr. Jones (White), the International Champion, in their next encounter at Charing Cross.

Black.

1. I have just returned from
abroad.

This is a bold and masterly beginning on the part of Black, and at once makes the game difficult for White, for whatever rejoinder he makes, it is easy for Black to pursue his advantage. There is only one move which White could make in reply to the preceding remark which could cut the ground from under Black's feet, and it could not be used at this stage. Thus :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

White.

1. I have just returned from
abroad.

1. Good-bye.

This move, though decisive, belongs to a later phase of the game.

If White, therefore, is an impulsive and incautious player he will say "Really? Where have you been?" in which case his adversary simply walks over the course. If, however, White is prudent, he will merely say "Indeed?" in which case, though the chances still are that the game will end badly for him, he will at least have the satisfaction of making a fight for it. Black has only to keep doggedly to the line first taken up, and his ultimate victory is assured.

We subjoin the probable course of this game until such moment as it is evident that White has been put to flight.

Black.

White.

2. Yes, I have been driving
through the Ardennes.

Whatever White says he cannot now stop Black's advance. He may say either

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

White.

2. I don't know the Ardennes.

Or,

2. I know the Ardennes very well.

Or,

2. Oh!

but any one of these rejoinders comes to the same thing, as the course of the game is obvious for Black. He then continues :

Black.

3. The first day we drove from Namur to Dinant.

Here White may perhaps make a bold attempt at diversion, and open the attack in another direction. His reply, therefore, may be as follows :

Black.

White.

3. Indeed? What sort of country is it? Like the Lowlands, I daresay. Last year my wife and I drove through Scotland.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black, however, will be well advised to pay but little attention to this feint of White's, and to go straight on.

Black.

4. Scotland—ah, yes—that is more hackneyed, of course. I was about to say, the next day we left at nine and drove all the way to Rochefort—a long day.

5. Oh no, mine is an excellent traveller. In fact, we had meant to go to Laroche, but were told there was no room.

White.

4. A very long day. Wasn't your wife tired? Mine gets very easily tired, so we could only do short stages.

5. That may happen anywhere, of course. By the way, do you see how crowded the London hotels all are? They say there is no room for another American in the whole town.

Here Black had better briefly recognise White's last move, but instantly close up his further advance.

Black.

6. Yes, I dare say. But there are no Americans in the Ardennes. So we went on to Houffalise. There I found a telegram saying that I was bound to be in London this evening by the train arriving at six at Charing Cross.

White.

6. Charing Cross is a horrid place to arrive at, isn't it? I must say I like Waterloo. We have a little place in Hampshire, you know. . . .

Here White moves away as though to indicate that he is leaving for the little place in Hampshire at once; but Black interposes his person.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

7. So we decided to go to Trois Ponts and take the train from there.

8. (Firmly) But let me tell you. Next summer we mean to drive through Northern Italy. The first day we shall go from Genoa to——

White.

7. (Heartily) And here you are! Well, I hope the next time we meet——

From this point White is nowhere. This is an enjoyable game for Black, but it will probably not find favour with his adversary.

On the whole, the game most frequently played is the Autobiographical one, which can be combined with almost any opening that can be named. The really important move (as we have said already in speaking of the Weather Opening) in any of the games of the Autobiographical series, is not the opening one, but the rejoinder. Thus, supposing Black begins by an opening of an entirely vague character, White instantly responds by a move having a personal application to White's own character, health, or preferences. Now is the moment for Black to be on his guard. He may endeavour to make a diversion by keeping to a more general game, but White frustrates his tactics by bringing forward a piece of autobiography. Black's only hope is then to muster all his hobbies, which may perhaps outnumber

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

those of White, and make an advance which may ultimately secure him the victory.

If White, however, as is sometimes happily the case, is a player who considers as much the interest of the game as the necessity of winning it, she will make a sacrifice at the beginning—this is called the Friend's Gambit—and be guided in her rejoinder by her observation of Black's hobbies.

Thus :

THE FRIEND'S GAMBIT

Black.

White.

1. What a dark, cheerless
day it has been !

It is now White must be careful. If she sees that Black's hands are dyed a brownish-orange colour her first rejoinder will be—

Black.

White.

1. What a dark, cheerless
day it has been !

1. Hardly a day on which
to take photographs.

This gives Black's hobby an opportunity which should be instantly seized.

Or if White should have observed that Black has a

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

sprained wrist and his arm in a sling, her rejoinder may safely refer to bicycling.

It would take too long to give all the possible forms of White's reply, but it will easily be seen that Black's Weather Opening affords to the observant player endless opportunities of rejoinder.

Many a tolerably good player fails in a knowledge of the After-Dinner Openings, which it is nevertheless absolutely necessary to master. We will suppose that White and others are seated about the drawing-room, when they are joined by Black and his companions. Black should now have an opening quite ready, that he may begin the moment he drops into a chair by White. The best form of opening is to carry on the central idea of the talk just concluded in the dining-room. Thus :

AFTER-DINNER OPENING

Black.

I. We have been having a most interesting discussion since you left us.

White.

I. Indeed ! What about ?

This, of course, assumes that Black has some foundation for his assertion, and is prepared to follow it up by a whole series of interesting moves. Otherwise it is better to break fresh ground.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

The following would not be a very good beginning :

Black.

1. I have eaten a dish of
almonds and raisins since
we parted.

If, as is often the case, Black sits down with a vacant smile and says nothing, White should begin—

Variation :

White.

1. Have you been talking
of very interesting things
since we left you ?

2. Carpets! Are you an
authority?

Black.

1. We have been talking
about—let me see—carpets.

This is an incautious move for White. If Black is quick to take advantage of it, he will force the game, and in the course of a very few moves White will be taken from garret to cellar all over Black's new house.

THE WOMEN'S AFTER-DINNER OPENING

is to be used when White and her companions have retired with the hostess from the dining-room into the drawing-room.

There already exist one or two received openings.

If there is a fire, it is customary for the first player who enters to say with rapture to the next,

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

First Player.

1. How delightful the fire looks !

Second Player.

1. Yes, I always like a fire in the evening.

The second player's object is insidiously to lead up to a description of her domestic evenings, with some details relating to her habits and those of her husband. The first player generally shields herself by interposing her health.

First Player.

2. I'm so very chilly, a fire never comes amiss to me.

2. { You
We } always like a
{ They } fire.

This is not likely to lead to a game of any marked interest.

The most advantageous openings on these occasions are the distinctly feminine ones—the Children's Opening, the Obscure Complaint Opening, the Maids' Faults Opening, the Best School Opening, &c. &c.

Some players who believe themselves to be suffering from suppressed intelligence—a very common form of social hysteria—will be found to object to the above openings, and to prefer to attempt more ambitious ones, which may seem to testify to greater capacity, but in this they are mistaken. It will be generally found that the frankly dull and the undoubtedly intelligent will be quite ready to play the feminine game.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

The following is one of the most fruitful of the above openings :

CHILDREN'S OPENING

Black.

1. Are your children quite well ?

Here White should be careful. She may be inclined to take undue advantage of Black's opening, but she should restrain herself. To make this clearer, we subjoin an example of a faulty treatment of this opening.

Black.

1. Are your children quite well ?

White.

1. Quite, thank you—for them, that is. But Jack is such a sensitive child, he has such a highly organised nervous system—it often goes with exceptional intelligence, I'm told—that he has never been quite so sturdy as ordinary children. Still, he may grow out of it, of course. My eldest boy, Dick, was just the same, and now you could not see a finer boy anywhere, and he is getting on so well at school.

Black, having been unable to check White's rapid advance, has now no course but the following :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

2. Where is he at school?

White.

2. At Mr. Poodle's, near Streatham. It really is the best school in England, I believe. We are entirely satisfied with it—there are fifty-two boys, and they are all so well taught, and so well taken care of. When Tom had the chicken-pox last year, Mrs. Poodle wrote to me every day to tell me how he was. You know how anxious one feels. Really when Jacky had measles last year I nearly went out of my mind with anxiety, though he had it very slightly. I would not eat, I would not go out, I didn't take my clothes off at night, even when the child was nearly well. I'm so emotional, you know, I fidget so. It's having such a sensitive nature, I suppose, but I can't help it. I say sometimes to my husband, 'Really, Charles, I quite envy people who don't feel—I feel so much!' I've always been the same. I remember when I was a girl, &c. &c.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

The game having reached this point, Black's prospects are well-nigh hopeless. After this Black will be careful not to use the above opening with the same player. This is better :

Black.

1. Are your children quite well ?
2. Very well, indeed, thank you.
3. Yes, he is, I am sorry to say. Where is yours ?

White.

1. Quite, thank you — I hope yours are the same.
2. Let me see—your eldest boy must be at school by this time, isn't he ?

This is much more favourable, and though not a game leading to any originality of combination, it will be found to be of sustained interest to both parties.

The above, and any of the feminine openings, will of course be found to be equally useful at five-o'clock tea. We append one or two special openings for the latter occasion.

ARRIVAL OPENING

(White is the hostess—Black the new arrival, who probably has on a jet cape.)

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

1. How lucky I am to find you at home !

White.

1. How glad I am I happened to be in !

Or, if it should be the hostess's day at home,

Black.

1. I have at last managed to come on Tuesday.

White.

1. It is so kind of you to remember it.

This will probably lead, as Black sits down, to the discussion of the advisability of having "days"—that is, if the players are moderately intelligent.

It is intentionally that I am not suggesting any openings derived from the topics of the day. They are sure to arise of themselves during the course of conversation, but they do not come within the scope of our present pamphlet, as they should not, generally speaking, be used as openings. It would sound very abrupt if a new arrival at five-o'clock tea were to say as he or she dropped into a seat by a neighbour, "How very grey St. Paul's used to be !" A received formula is much needed here, and I would suggest that the following simple openings should invariably be used :

If the players are acquainted, but have not met for a long time, then use—

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

THE LONG-SEPARATION OPENING

Black.

1. What a long time it is
since we have met!

White.

1. Indeed it is! I have
been so frightfully busy all
this month.

White's object in making this rejoinder is to convey the impression that if she had not been so busy she would have spent all her time with Black.

Black.

2. There is so much to do
at this time of the year.

This last is one of those useful moves which may lead in almost any direction, according to the idiosyncrasies of the players. If they have met recently, then use the

RENEWED-MEETING OPENING

Black.

1. We meet again! How
delightful!

White.

1. Charming!

Or if the players are introduced as they sit down, but although they have not met before, know of each other, then let them use the following :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black.

White.

1. We are friends once removed.

1. To be nearer.

White's move may alarm Black, but it is simply a form, and not intended to lead the way to White's leaving a card upon Black the next day. Or if they should never have met before and not be friends once removed, which, however, seldom happens, let them use the following :

Black.

White.

1. Tea be with you.

1. And cake with you.

Indeed, this last opening is a most useful one, and might fitly be always adopted by players of either sex at moments of arrival or greeting in the afternoon—on ordinary occasions, that is. On special occasions, such as a Drawing Room tea, for instance, the opening employed, as well as the subsequent course of the game, should be a little different.

DRAWING ROOM TEA OPENING

White against the Field. (White is the lady who has been to the Drawing Room, Black her visitor.)

Black begins, looking at White's dress.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

First Player.

White.

1. Oh, how beautiful !

1. Do you like it ?

Second Player.

White.

1. Oh, *how* lovely !

2. I'm so glad you like it.

Third Player.

White.

1. Oh, that *is* lovely !

3. That *is* kind of you.

It will be seen that this game does not offer much variety or brilliancy. After all the players on the Black side have made the same move, responded to in the above direction by White, the first player of the Black side should now make a bold attempt at outflanking White and capturing the teapot. But White should instantly interpose her train and check any further advance. Black has then no resource but to abandon her attack on the tea-tray, and concentrate her attention on White's costume.

The conclusion of this somewhat uninteresting game will be found later, in the section which treats of Endings.

BREAD-AND-BUTTER OPENING

It will be highly beneficial to practise evolving interesting combinations from this apparently commonplace opening, for it is of almost universal use.

p.n.

interpose
her
train

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

Black is here the male interlocutor, White the female

White.

Will you have some
brown bread and butter?

And what do you con-
sider the difference between
them?

Variation :

Black.

1. Thank you. I believe
mankind are divided into
eaters of brown bread and
eaters of white bread.
2. I believe the eaters of
white bread to be Philis-
tines.

PLAYFUL BREAD-AND-BUTTER OPENING

White.

1. Will you have white
bread or brown?
2. Really! I didn't know
that—I hope you don't
think I was implying that
you needed it.

Black.

1. Brown, please. It makes
brain, I believe.
2. I am not sure. It would
be quite in keeping with
the general heartlessness of
your demeanour towards
me, &c. &c.

In the course of a very few moves Black should be
utterly vanquished, and at White's mercy.

The Bread-and-Butter Opening can also be used at
breakfast. It should be borne in mind that Breakfast
Openings require somewhat special treatment. Generally
speaking, the conversation at breakfast bears the same

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

sort of relation to the conversation at dinner that a morning tweed costume does to evening dress and diamonds. It requires some skill, therefore, to prevent it degenerating into absolute flatness and dullness. The openings are apt to be personal, not to say introspective.

NIGHT'S INQUIRIES OPENING

The following is the usual form of this opening, but we cannot recommend it.

White against Black and the field.

Black.

1. I hope you slept well?

First Player.

1. I woke at 5.20.

Second Player.

1. Quite a wonder for me,
I was asleep when I was
called.

Third Player.

1. I always wake at six.

Fourth Player.

1. I heard seven strike just
as I opened my eyes.

White.

1. Well, no. I've been
awake since five.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

From this point White is nowhere, and the field wins easily. The following is a better rejoinder :

White.

1. I have been awake since five.

First Player.

1. I am so sorry for you.

Second Player.

1. I know how tired that makes one.

Third Player.

1. All the same, I must say that I have not noticed any signs of impaired brilliancy, &c.

This is likely to be a more enjoyable game for White than the preceding.

CORRESPONDENCE OPENING

Black.

1. Is there no place beyond the reach of the daily post?

White.

1. Would you really like that? I know men say they hate receiving letters—I always wonder whether they mean it.

This is a good rejoinder on the part of White, as it should shortly lead to a discussion of male and female idiosyncrasies.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

The following treatment of the same opening is to be avoided :

Black.

1. Is there no place beyond
the reach of the daily post ?

White.

1. Beyond the reach of it !
Oh, I should hate that ! I
am miserable when I am
away from home unless I
hear every day.

Black should here be on his guard, as White is leading up to reading aloud her head nurse's daily budget, in which case she gives mate in two moves.

Of course there are many cases where the direction of the required opening is obviously indicated, by the players standing in some particular relation towards each other or towards the game. We will not attempt to give all these, but merely indicate a few common occasions when an opening formula is most needed.

MINOR POET'S OPENING

White.

1. I have just been reading
your charming verses.

Black.

1. Oh, how kind of you !

This opening should only be addressed to Minor Poets. It would be improper to use it on being introduced to Tennyson. The same remark applies to the following :

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

ASPIRING NOVELIST'S OPENING

White.

1. I have just been reading
your delightful novel.

Black.

1. How very kind of you!

In both of these the game promises well for Black.

FRIEND'S READING OPENING

This is much needed: it is the one to be used on reaching the conclusion of a chapter of manuscript, read aloud by the author to a very small circle of friends.

White represents the innocent reader, Black the uncandid listener.

Black must always begin.

Black.

1. Thank you so much!
How delightful that is!

White.

1. Do you really think so?

So far the game is obvious, but Black's next move will require some skill.

Black.

2. Indeed I do. It is
most . . .

Black should be careful. On the choice of the epithet

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

he places here depends his line of subsequent action. He must be partly governed, of course, in his choice, by the MS. work. This game is nearly always to the advantage of White, though there may be exceptions on rare occasions, when Black takes an unexpected line and completely crushes his adversary.

THE PERFORMER'S OPENING

The conclusion of a musical performance also demands a formula. One such, it is true, already exists, but it never comes quite at the right moment. It is now customary for one of the audience to say, after a minute's silence, "Thank you so much. What is that?" The player responds "Handel" or "Grieg" as the case may be ; the audience know then whether to admire it or not, and the current of talk is re-established. But this is not enough, for it does not prevent the horrible pause at the conclusion of the piece. It is imperative that the performer, whom I will call White, should speak first, as he or she knows exactly when the piece has come to an end, and the audience generally does not. I propose, therefore, that White should do away with that moment of agony by saying in a clear voice—

White.

1. Here ends the piece by
Bach.

Black.

1. Of so much beauty.

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

This is much more favourable for White than if waiting for Black to begin.

PERSONAL OPENINGS

There are infinite varieties of these. For instance :

Black.

1. I thought we were never going to meet again.

White.

1. I am glad the time has seemed so long to you.

The course of this game, and many others like it, is so obvious that it is not worth while to dwell upon it.

The above few suggestions will indicate, but in the most sketchy and inadequate manner, the directions in which it would be well that ordinary mortals should bend their conversational energies. But to begin is not everything—a beginning generally implies a continuation and an ending ; and, though the average players will generally find that, the beginning once accomplished, the continuation goes smoothly enough, the ending perhaps may present some difficulty. Some conversations, from the force of circumstances, are allowed to tail gradually off until they vanish into nothing from whence they came, without any one knowing the exact moment of their

CONVERSATIONAL OPENINGS

cessation. Of others, however, it is unhappily required that at a given moment they shall be brought to a definite close, which is most difficult to accomplish gracefully.

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

Most necessary, therefore, are Conversational Endings; for two players, for instance, meeting on neutral ground at an evening party. Who does not, on such an occasion, know the difficulty of parting from some chance acquaintance to whom one may unwarily have stopped to speak, both longing to part company, but neither knowing how to effect the parting? Here none of the ordinary leave-taking formulas or ceremonies will be of any use. You cannot shake hands and say good-bye when you are going no farther than the other side of the room. It is absolutely imperative, therefore, it is a crying need, that some half-way formula should be found. There was a game of our youth which consisted of one of the players shouting "I spy" whenever he caught sight of another, and running after the player who was sighted. Why should we not agree to do the same at evening parties? When we are stranded in talk with Lady Smith, at the Academy *Soirée*, say, why should we not be entitled, if we catch the eye of another player, to call out "I spy Jones!" and leave

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

Lady Smith's side in pursuit? This may seem somewhat abrupt, but it would be understood that it meant "Dear me! there is another acquaintance I ought to go and speak to—though I need not say how sorry I am to bring this delightful *tête-à-tête* to a close." This, therefore, is my suggested

ACADEMY ENDING

Black.

1. I spy Jones!

White.

1. I spy Brown!

(This is a feint on the part of White, but it will greatly facilitate the moves of the players in different directions.)

Varieties of the above :

Black.

1. Why, there is Mrs. M.
I must go and ask her how
her sister is.

To this White has no opportunity of making any rejoinder.

Even more critical than the above situation is that of two people at a small dinner-party, who have been washed up on to a sofa or against a wall, and left there forlornly as though on a lonely reef. They cannot, as at a larger

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

gathering, hope to be rescued by the ebb and flow of a moving crowd, by whose friendly aid they may drop apart unperceived.

We will suppose that Black, after dinner, has unwarily subsided into a vacant chair by White ; that they have got lamely enough through the usual openings, and that after a somewhat purposeless encounter they are now in perpetual check. What is to be done next ? This is a terrible social problem which as yet has never been satisfactorily solved. If one of the players has coolness and daring enough, it is no doubt better to apply to the endings the principle I have already applied to the beginnings, that is, abruptly to use one arising from the situation itself. Thus :

Black.

1. Well, I hope the next time
we meet I shall convert you.
(Rises.)

White.

1. Or perhaps I shall convert you.

But even this implies that some sort of consecutive talk had preceded this ending, whereas sometimes there is absolutely nothing.

As it is, this is what now generally happens :

Black brings the situation to an abrupt and awkward close by a meaningless repetition of his last remark, accompanying it with a sort of sickly laugh, as though

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

implying "I am not really going away and leaving you alone, though it looks as if I were," while White does the same—*her* laugh meaning to convey "I don't feel in the least as though I were left alone on a sofa in the middle of the room with no one to speak to." Thus :

Black.

1. Yes, it is a very interesting book. He, he!

White.

1. Yes, very. Ha, ha!

This is unpardonably feeble. Would it not be better than this, at any rate, to use the formulas which, happily, are still employed in correspondence? (I say designedly, "still employed," for probably the tendency of the age will eventually do away with these remaining epistolary ceremonies as well, and substitute "Ta-ta, old girl," for "I am, dear Lady So-and-So, yours very sincerely.")

Nobody thinks it crude or abrupt to bring a letter to an end in the first page, or the middle of the second, or at whatever stage the writer finds he has nothing more to say, by putting "Yours sincerely," or "Yours faithfully," as the case may be. Why should not this custom be introduced into verbal intercourse? It is a pity that we have not some customary phrase corresponding to the Spanish *con que*, which is often used as a transition to a

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

conclusion, or to something absolutely irrelevant. Our best equivalent would probably be "upon which."

White.

1. Yes it is very interesting.

2. And I respond.

Black.

1. Very. Upon which, with kindest regards, I am yours sincerely. (Rises.)

Or, if preferred, the Spanish phrase can be retained in the original, as there are many people to whom the employment of a foreign phrase for which there is an exact equivalent in English seems to give a finish, a point, and an adornment to the remark which it would not otherwise possess. Such a one may therefore say :

Black.

1. Yes, very interesting.
Con que, I remain yours
faithfully.

White.

1. And I respond.

The Endings on quitting a house, after a party or a visit, present less difficulty, but they nevertheless require to be managed with a certain amount of skill. There are happily already one or two formulas in general use. The

REGRETFUL SURPRISE ENDING

is almost invariably used by the host and hostess ; but there are different forms of reply to it. We subjoin one or two examples.

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

(White is the hostess, Black the departing guest.)

White.

1. Must you go already?
(*regretfully.*)
2. Oh! (*Then with a tinge
of effusion in addition to the
regret*) Good-bye.

Black.

1. I am afraid I must. It
is getting very late.

White's second move may seem rather inadequate, but still it is the wisest on the whole, as it obviates all necessity for rejoinder on the part of Black.

Only the most inexperienced will make the following rejoinder :

White.

1. Must you really go?

Black.

1. Well, perhaps I might
stay half an hour longer.

White is checkmated.

FRIEND-IN-CARRIAGE ENDING

White.

1. Must you really go?
2. Oh, what a pity she did
not come up!

Black.

1. I am afraid I must. I
have a friend waiting for me
in the carriage.

This is a mistake on the part of Black, as it leaves a

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

somewhat involved and purposeless game, which Black will find it best to bring to an abrupt close by withdrawing from the position.

A better variation of the above is that of

THE WAITING AUNT

White.

1. Must you really go?

Black.

1. Yes, I promised to pick up my aunt in the carriage at half-past four o'clock.

This is better, as White can make no telling rejoinder, and Black will find it easy to effect a speedy retreat.

There are many other forms of this ending, but they are all variations of the same central idea, namely, a feint of surprise on the part of White, to be followed by an instant rejoinder on the part of Black, justifying his action.

There are, of course, certain endings appropriate to special occasions, such as the Drawing Room Tea described above. The following is a very frequently used, but quite faulty, Drawing Room Tea ending.

Black.

1. Now I must go on to Hill Street to see Lady Marchmont's train.

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

This move is not a graceful one, for it implies the existence of some one else dressed in the same way as White. It is better to continue the game on the lines on which it was begun, that is, to assume that Black had never conceived the existence of any one looking as magnificent as White, and that the latter must surely be the only person in London to whom it has on this day occurred to assume so remarkable a costume. I propose, then, that the following valedictory benediction should be used by the players on Black's side to bring the game to a close :

DRAWING ROOM TEA ENDING

Black.

White.

1. Feathers be on your head.

1. And hats on yours.

This ending is simple as well as beautiful.



As a general rule, players should remember that it is a mistake in tactics to advance too many reasons at once, for by so doing they but unmask the weakness of their position and place themselves at their adversary's mercy.

The most important maxim of all in playing the game of conversation is to keep one's attention from wandering

CONVERSATIONAL ENDINGS

for a moment from one's adversary's game, on which it should be concentrated from the beginning to the end. The player who observes this rule is almost certain to be successful.

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

In addition to the above variations of the game of small talk almost invariably played in London drawing-rooms, something with more movement is often needed. We subjoin, therefore, the names of a few more active games that will be found very diverting for a large number of players.

THE CRUSH

In this game the players all dress up, then meet at a place previously agreed upon, and come upstairs in separate groups to the room they are going to play in. When they are all assembled in it they begin to push each other very hard and to scream as loud as they can. After doing this for an hour they should all squeeze down the stairs again, as many as possible abreast this time, and run to another room on the ground floor and stand and yell round a table on which there are things to eat. The object is to snatch the things to eat first, and each player

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

leaves off yelling for a moment as he gets a plate. After this is done the players all run out of the room, which is as hot as possible, and stand in a draughty doorway opening to the street. It is now the turn of some players standing outside to scream and run about, and look for carriages which are hiding round the corner. As each carriage is captured it is brought up to the door and a name called out, and then the players inside whose names are called must stick their elbows into the people nearest them, run out, jump into the carriage and drive off. The object is to drive away first. The player who is left till the last is the one who is bored.

This game is a very favourite one in London, and is played in any weather and all the year round, except in August and September.

THE MUSICAL PARTY, OR UNMUSICAL CHAIRS

This is a variation of the well-known game of Musical Chairs, and can be played in two ways. But whereas in Musical Chairs the point is to run round the room without saying anything while the music is going on, and then sit down with a great noise when it leaves off, in the game I am going to describe the noise is begun before the music leaves off. In this game there is one person who must play either the violin or the piano ; this player is

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

"It." His object is to get to the end of a piece he is playing before the other players can speak. The hostess is the chief of the other camp, opposite to the person who is It, and her followers are bound to do as she does. If she sits quite silent they must do the same ; if she chatters they will, of course, chatter too. Then the moment It leaves off all the others must first clap their hands and then talk as loud and as fast as they can, and try to say as much as possible before It begins playing again. If It plays five times during the evening without any one having spoken, he has won. But the chances in this game are in favour of the other side.

The other form of this game, as played in unmusical houses, is very like the one described above under the name of Crush. In this form the players who have sat down on chairs near the performer, all try to jump out of them and run and mix with the people farther back, who are playing Crush and screaming very loud. If, when the game is played in this way, the performer who is It suddenly leaves off, this is counted as a defeat for the hostess.

FRIENDS IN THE CORNER

This game is generally played after a dinner party. The hostess is It. The great art in this game consists in grouping the players successfully.

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

This is a very common form of playing it. First of all, make all the female players sit as near one another as possible after they come up from dinner. They then converse together (directions for this part of the game will be found earlier under the head of After-Dinner Openings) until they are joined by an equal number of players of the other sex, one or two of whom now sit down next to the outside female players, the rest of whom, who are un-get-atable, continue to sit inside and smile; and no one moves again until suddenly, everybody gets up to go.

There is another form of this game. The hostess is still in this form, which is more active than the other. All the female players move a little when the others join them, so that male and female players are dotted about the room in pairs. The amusing thing for the hostess now to do is to walk about in the middle and wait till each couple has got into conversation, and then propose a general change of partners.

An amusing and easy drawing-room trick derived from the above is

THE VANISHING CONVERSATION

Let two players stand in the middle of the room, facing each other, and begin a conversation. As soon as they are absorbed in it, let the hostess place a chair

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

behind each, imploring them to sit down. Then when they are seated it will be found that the conversation has utterly vanished.

It requires no special intelligence on the part of the hostess to accomplish this trick. On the contrary.

Another capital drawing-room trick is

THE INVISIBLE JOKE

Let two or three of the male players laugh very loud. Then let the female players ask them why they are laughing. Then let one of the male players, still laughing all the time, relate the joke; this must be a story which turns on a bear having a lighted fusee dropped upon his nose, or else on some quite unnecessary and violent oaths being used by somebody on a given occasion. It will then be found that the joke has become absolutely invisible, and all the players in the female camp will be quite unable to see it.

HIDING THE TEAPOT

This can only be played at a small gathering, say an ordinary day at home, not a large party. The hostess must first hide the teapot in the dining-room, then she must go upstairs and sit there waiting for the people who

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

are to look for it. Then two or three of them must come in and pretend to talk while they look for the teapot. At last the hostess must tell each one in turn where it is. Then they get up quickly and go downstairs to find it, saying they are coming back. This is the amusing part of the game. Then when they have found it they must go out into the street.

AMATEURS

This is a very amusing game and often leads to a good deal of laughter. In it the players, called Amateurs, must each assume a given name. Thus one will pretend to be a poet, another a musician, another a painter, &c. &c., and they must all imitate the real people they are called after, and write a poem, compose an opera, or paint a picture, and show these things to everybody they know. Then the people to whom the things are shown must all say "Hooray!" and clap their hands very loud. Then the Amateurs must run out into the street and show them to people they don't know, and ask these as well to say "Hooray," and clap their hands too. If they do so, which, however, does not always happen, the Amateurs have won.

There is a very diverting variation of the above game, called Amateur Actors, which affords endless amusement to the lookers-on.

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

CAPPING MALADIES

This game can be played by two or more players. Each one chooses the name of a disease, and must, alternately with his adversary, enumerate all the symptoms that belong to it, the object being to have the most symptoms of a dangerous kind. If two players have chosen the same disease, the one that has had it oftenest wins, and goes on talking after the others have left off. Seven times influenza is game.

POUNCERS

is a splendid game. The player who is It, generally of the female sex, is called the Pouncer. She stands in the middle of the room, the other players in groups round her. After looking round to see where to pounce, she suddenly makes for a group of two. She must then talk to one of them until she has succeeded in taking him from the other. Each capture counts one to the Pouncer. To attain proficiency in this game nothing but quickness of the eye and a fair amount of practice are requisite.

* * * * *

There are many diverting card tricks played in London, too numerous to describe here. One very good one is to take a plate full of cards lying face upwards, then choose

DRAWING-ROOM GAMES

one ; and having looked at the address on it and put it under the others, shuffle them together. Then go to the address aforesaid and let the person who opens the door choose a card out of those in your hand. After three days look on your hall table, and if the trick has succeeded you will find on it a card exactly like the one you chose at first. This is a most ingenious trick, and a dexterous player will sometimes succeed in doing it several hundred times successfully in the same week.

* * * * *

There are many other little games played in London drawing-rooms ; but the few described above, together with the different varieties of the game of small talk, will be found among the most useful, as well as the most entertaining.

It is with great diffidence that this effete little volume is offered to the public. It is not intended to come beneath the notice of brilliant talkers, experts in conversation, ornaments to society : from all such shining ones may its suggestions for ever be kept. May it come within the ken of those only who are less fortunately endowed, who know what it is to have limitations, what it is to be sometimes at a loss. It is to these, and not to the critical, the witty, or the eloquent, that this little jest-book is, in fellow-feeling and all humility, respectfully inscribed.

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